

DISCUSSION

HYPNOSIS IN THE SERVICE OF THE INSTRUCTOR

Hypnosis is often used for class demonstration and experimental purposes in courses in abnormal psychology. So many specific aspects of abnormal psychology may be quickly and concretely illustrated by means of hypnosis that a course would be very incomplete without actual experiments. In fact, it is historically correct to say that scientific abnormal psychology had its origin in experiments in hypnosis, for hypnosis makes possible the production under controlled laboratory conditions of abnormal mental processes such as occur in hallucinations, functional blindness, deafness, and paralysis, cutaneous anesthesia and hyperesthesia, and a host of other symptoms of the psychoneuroses. Especially significant in this connection is the work of Liébeault, Bernheim, and Charcot. The extent to which hypnotic phenomena may be profitably drawn upon in abnormal psychology is well illustrated by the contents of one of the best general introductory text-books in this field, Dr. Morton Prince's 'The Unconscious.' In a course which I give, with 'The Unconscious' as the chief text, I illustrate many of the points made by Dr. Prince by means of experiments not only in hypnosis but also in automatic writing and crystal gazing with profit, I am sure, to the class. Books intended for classroom use in certain fields of applied psychology also, sometimes make use of data regarding hypnosis. President Scott's 'Influencing Men in Business' is a good example of this, and to a less degree, his 'Psychology of Advertising.' The importance of suggestion in advertising, salesmanship, public speaking, and indeed in all fields in which the aim is to influence in any way whatsoever behavior and opinion, can be taught in no better way than through reference to hypnosis, in which suggestion operates in its most extreme degree. It is not often, however, so far as my own observation has extended, that actual experiments in hypnosis are performed in courses other than those in abnormal psychology.

There would seem to be many obvious advantages that might be gained through an extension of the practice of hypnosis by instructors not only in courses in applied psychology, but even in introductory courses in general psychology. First among these

advantages would be that of the increased interest which would be aroused among the students in the class. There is an unfortunate lack of interest shown in psychology by college students in many colleges in comparison, first, with the interest usually displayed in some other courses of study, as indicated by the enrollment in various departments, and second, with the interest that a concrete, scientific study of human behavior might be expected normally to create. How often one hears from students of elementary psychology the comment that the subject is 'dry'! All students really are interested in the science of human nature as it might be studied, but their interest is often killed in their first course both by the sort of traditional topics contained in many of the current text-books, and also by the manner of presentation of these topics both by the text-books and by the instructors. The inclusion in an introductory course of at least a few experiments in hypnosis to illustrate essential points would stimulate among the students a higher degree of interest than now generally exists.

A second advantage to be gained through including experiments in hypnosis in introductory courses in psychology would be the aid thereby given in proper instruction against spiritism and occultism in its various forms. Practically all American psychologists feel it their duty to question the claims of spiritism and of telepathy. But unless special pains are taken to obviate it, many students will remain skeptical if they accept hypnosis as a fact, and if, as is often the case, they classify it among occult phenomena involving telepathy. A denial by the instructor that there is anything in hypnosis which is not to be explained in behavioristic terms, if such denial is based merely upon description and theory, is much less effective than actual experiments with members of the class as subjects. And some of the students may easily and safely be taught to perform simple experiments in hypnosis, especially in light hypnosis. Two points can thereby be forcibly impressed upon the class: first, that practically all normal persons can be hypnotized, and second, that practically all normal persons can learn to hypnotize. Thus the normality of hypnosis and the absence of telepathy and animal magnetism in it can be brought home to all. To produce contractures and anesthesia in a subject by suggestion, and then to teach the subject to produce the same contractures and anesthesia by autosuggestion, is an excellent way of disabusing the popular mind or a class of students of the superstition that hypnosis involves in some way the direct domination of one will by another.

Moreover, in terms of certain processes which hypnosis may be used to illustrate, an explanation of some aspects of the work of mediums can be made without any need of reference to occult explanations.

More important, however, than the above two general uses of hypnosis for educational purposes is a third and more specific use, namely, that of teaching more adequately and illustrating more clearly many common psychological facts. For example, the meaning of hallucinations can be illustrated quickly and forcibly by hypnosis. A mere definition of the term, with examples, is pedagogically ineffective in comparison with a single class demonstration. Specific use may be made of deep hypnosis in the general psychology class as an aid to instruction regarding sleep and the dream consciousness. The denial of dreamless sleep in those cases where there is no memory for dreams upon awakening may be shown to be possible in view of the complete amnesia that may follow a hypnotic trance crammed with vivid experiences. The solving of problems during sleep may be illustrated by hypnosis. Instructional use of hypnosis may be made in the discussion of one very important aspect of human motivation, namely, subconscious motivation, which can be illustrated briefly and strikingly through post-hypnotic suggestion. Post-hypnotic suggestion more than anything else, perhaps, except automatic writing, illustrates the nature of dissociation and of subconscious processes. A clear illustration of dissociation can be given in five minutes or less by producing in a subject in light, waking hypnosis, amnesia for his name, with the suggestion that his hand will write it automatically while the amnesia still persists. Another simple experiment, which can be done almost as quickly, showing the independent activity of dissociated processes in a greater degree than the experiment just referred to, is one in subconscious computation. In light hypnosis the subject may be given a problem in mental arithmetic, for which amnesia may be produced immediately, with the suggestion that his hand will write automatically the answer in five minutes, during which time the subject will be paying attention (consciously) only to the lecture or to the class discussion. Brief reference to functional diseases, such as hysterical blindness, deafness, aphonia, paralysis, etc., is justified in an introductory course in psychology, and these topics can be taught more effectively in a half-hour by means of an artificial temporary production of the diseases than in many hours without such illustration.

If some of these subjects are now outside the field of general psy-

chology as usually taught, this fact alone might suggest one reason why courses in general psychology are often unsatisfactory and unattractive to students. Such topics are among the most fundamental in the understanding of normal human behavior and consciousness. Especially in courses in general psychology that run through the whole college year there could easily be found a place for these subjects, and for the illustration of them through hypnosis. A present-day trend in the direction of broadening the scope of courses in general psychology is illustrated by a text-book recently published, Dr. C. R. Griffith's 'General Introduction to Psychology.'¹ This book contains one chapter on 'Hypnosis and the Subconscious,' and another on 'Psychology and Medicine,' which includes a further discussion of hypnosis. And Dr. B. C. Ewer's 'Applied Psychology'² illustrates a tendency to include in applied psychology more material of the sort which may be illustrated by hypnosis. In this book of less than 500 pages, practically 50 pages are devoted to the two chapters on 'Subconsciousness' and 'Suggestion,' and five chapters (more than 100 pages) deal with 'Mind and Health.'

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¹ Published by Macmillan, 1923.

² Published by Macmillan, 1923.